

Appropriations Hearing, Department of Housing
Friday, February 17, 2017

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and Members of the Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in CT.

My name is Kellyann Day and I am the Chief Executive Officer for New Reach, Inc. New Reach is an organization that has been helping homeless women, children and families since 1990. It is our mission to inspire independence for those affected by homelessness and poverty through a continuum of housing and services using the most innovative and progressive methods.

New Reach serves Connecticut families and households who are struggling with homelessness and poverty throughout New Haven and Fairfield Counties. One hundred percent of New Reach clients are low- or very low-income, earning below 30% of the Area Median Income. Our emergency, rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing programs are designed to serve diverse client populations, including multi-generational families, residents with HIV/AIDS, residents who are physically or mentally disabled, chronically homeless residents, LGBTQ residents, and Youth (ages 18-24) aging out of foster care. As the leading provider of family shelter and supportive housing services in CT, New Reach works daily to help those experiencing homelessness and poverty to overcome barriers to their independence.

Unfortunately, housing instability is a common occurrence in Connecticut. According to the United Way, 37% of households in Connecticut are living pay check to paycheck and at risk of experiencing homelessness. There are thousands of households in Connecticut with income above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but below a basic cost-of-living threshold. These households struggle to pay for the basic necessities of housing, child-care, food, healthcare and transportation.

Regardless of our struggles, this year, Connecticut has made incredible strides toward ending chronic homelessness by matching all individuals who are currently identified as chronically homeless with permanent housing. This has been made possible through extensive multilevel collaboration across federal and state agencies, private funders and community organizations. Further, Connecticut has demonstrated national leadership in establishing best practices for addressing homelessness among veterans and those experiencing chronic homelessness. We have made remarkable progress but our work does not end here. We are in need of ongoing funding support to continue to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents. We recognize that Connecticut is in a place where tough choices have to be made with our state budget. However, not only does housing the homeless save lives, but it also saves public dollars.

Preserving state investments will allow us to maintain the progress we already achieved. Governor Malloy and our legislative leaders have long understood and supported the importance of ending homelessness in our state in both fiscal and human terms. I ask that you continue that support. The current budget proposal preserves funding for critical housing and homelessness services and supports, including:

- The DOH Housing/Homeless Services line item, \$73.7 million in FY 18 and \$78.3 million in FY 19, for frontline housing/homeless services, outreach, emergency shelters, and the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), which are essential to aid those who have fallen into homelessness and move them quickly to permanent housing. The Rental Assistance Program funds the rental subsidies which make Supportive Housing possible. Supportive Housing continues to be the most effective housing model to assist people experiencing chronic homelessness and is proven to cut public system costs by up to 70%.

- The Homeless Youth line item: Youth outreach services, crisis housing for youth, and housing services and supports are essential services to transition youth from crisis to stability.

State and federal investments in ending homelessness are working: The number of people experiencing homelessness is going down year after year.

As you know, Connecticut was one of the first states in the nation recognized by the federal government for ending chronic homelessness among Veterans; and one of only three states to end all homelessness among veterans.

The HUD 2015 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report showed a drop of nearly 50% in chronic homelessness between 2014 and 2015 in Connecticut. This was the largest reduction in any state. In December 2016, CT matched all chronically homeless individuals to a housing resource.

Every year, we are seeing declining numbers of people experiencing homelessness. This is the evidence of the progress we are making. For example, the 2016 Point-in-Time (PIT) count showed the lowest number of people experiencing homelessness in CT, a fourth year of decline and a 13% decrease since the first count in 2007.

Cuts to these services would risk reversing the substantial progress we have made to end chronic homelessness. Cuts to these critically important services could mean increases in unsheltered, high-need homelessness. Any cuts would take us in the wrong direction and impose new costs on our communities and the state in the form of incarceration, hospitalization, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and child protective and foster care involvement, to name a few.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. Investments in frontline homeless services, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and support services save public resources and help families and individuals transition to housing, stability, and hope.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,
Kellyann V. Day, LMSW
Chief Executive Officer
New Reach, Inc.